

One American's Pilgrimage to Mecca (The Hajj)

-Michael Wolfe

Overview

The annual Hajj or pilgrimage of Islam brings millions of Muslims to Mecca, located on the west coast of Saudi Arabia. All Muslims, both men and women, who are financially and physically able, are expected to attend the Hajj at least once in their lives. The pilgrimage consists of several ceremonies meant to symbolize the essential concepts of Islam and commemorate the trials of prophet Abraham and his family. The hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam and an essential part of a Muslim's faith and practice. This week-long event occurs two months and ten days after Ramadan ends, during the Muslim month of Dhul-Hijjah.

In this lesson, students compare and contrast some of their cultural events with the Hajj. They will also learn of the activities involved during the pilgrimage and their historic and spiritual importance to Muslims.

Objectives

- Reflect on the importance of rituals in familiar events enjoyed by themselves and with their families;
- Understand that many of the same activities and motivations associated with these events are enjoyed by Muslims who attend the Hajj;
- Understand where the Hajj takes place in Mecca and that people travel from all parts of the world to attend;
- Understand the specific ritual activities of the Hajj, their historic relevance, and importance to Islam;
- Appreciate the diversity of other groups' religious and cultural traditions;
- Understand the importance of attending the Hajj and its spiritual impact from an American Muslim's point of view;
- Identify ways in which other religious and traditional practices are similar to one's own.

Student Directions: During and after viewing the first two segments of The Hajj answer the questions from parts one and two below.

The Hajj, Part One

Synopsis: Michael Wolfe, an American writer and reporter decides to share his travel to Mecca to experience the hajj pilgrimage. He discusses his expectations and reasons for making the trip.

While viewing questions:

1. Describe Wolfe's expectations before going to the hajj.
2. Why did he feel he needed to make this journey?
3. Why does he feel Islam is the best religion for him?

The Hajj, Part Two

Synopsis: Wolfe discusses his experience at the hajj and describes the different rituals and their meaning as well as their effect on him.

Viewing questions:

1. What were Wolfe's recollections of the main activities in the Hajj:
 - Entering a state of ihram
 - The tawaf or circular walking around the Ka'aba
 - The sa'i or seven trips between the small hills named Safa and Marwah
 - The visit to the Plain of Arafat
 - The throwing of the stones
2. What connections do the rituals of the hajj have with historical events?
3. What was the ultimate goal of the hajj for Wolfe?
4. What were some of the positive experiences Wolfe had at the hajj?